



WORDS TO LEAVE BY

There are five fundamental declarations that drive most of human interaction:

- No
- Yes
- Thank you
- I'm sorry
- I don't know.

These declarations are key to a well-executed exit from a work situation. By well-executed, I mean an exit that ensures your dignity as the person leaving and the dignity of those being left behind, allowing the work to continue with less disruption. I also mean an exit in which there is little or no “emotional wake” because people are complete with one another. It doesn't mean no sadness, just no unfinished business. Let's look at each declaration more closely.

No. Part of an effective leave-taking is: knowing what the *no* in the situation means. It's being so clear in your own mind about the reasons you were said *no* to – because your manager gave you really clear feedback, you listened carefully and you understood why you were let go – that you send zero mixed signals of any kind, nothing that would lead people to believe you are confused or uncertain about what happened.

Yes. Once you know the reasons the organization said *no* to you, then you can start to get clear about what you can *yes* to, what draws you forward. Again, this may not be something you discuss much with colleagues in your leave-taking pro-

cess. However, it is critically important that it be clear in your own mind where you're headed – what you intend to say *yes* as you move forward.

Thank you. What gratitude do you need to express, and to whom, in order to take your leave with grace? Who helped you along the way, who supported you (even if they didn't know they were doing so)? Who have been your champions? Who labored long and hard because they believed in you? Those are all people who deserve a personal, written *thank you* before you depart. Be sure to be specific: “thanks, you were a big help” is nowhere near as meaningful or useful as “I really appreciated the care, thought and attention you put into running the meetings on the XXX project. We always started on time and ended on time and everyone knew what they were supposed to do next.”

I'm sorry. For closure to be complete, to whom do you owe an apology? It could be either for sins of commission or omission: “I'm sorry I've been so short with you the last few weeks as I dealt with the current uncertainty. Will you forgive me?” or “I'm sorry that I failed to follow up on your request for more heads on this project back in January; I should have done better. Will you forgive me?”

I don't know. Every new beginning requires an ending and then a period of uncertainty. Are you comfortable inside

yourself as you're leaving with all the things you don't know and can't know for some time to come? Make a list of those things and review it tenderly, watching your own emotional reactions so that you know where your fears lie. The more aware of those fears you are – and the more observant of them – the less they can

control you, sneak up on you or flatten you with sheer terror.

Use the rest of this page as a worksheet to figure out what work you have to do around each of the declarations in order to leave with grace and dignity.

Declaration	Person(s) you need to say it to:	Action you need to take:
<i>No</i>		
<i>Yes</i>		
<i>Thank you</i>		
<i>I'm sorry</i>		
<i>I don't know</i>		